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A Friend in Need? Friends and Frances Burney's Place in the Literary Canon

One look at the number of available modern editions of Frances Burney's debut novel, *Evelina*, leaves little doubt as to the writer's prominent place in the literary canon of English eighteenth-century prose. When the book was first published in 1778, it became an instant commercial success, running through four editions within two years (Chisholm 1998: 47). It also soon gained much praise from the most prominent literary critics at the time, such as Samuel Johnson and Edmund Burke. However, the trajectory of Burney's popularity since her acclaimed debut to the modern day recognition has been far from a smooth and even path. On the contrary, over the years the critical assessment of her career has significantly varied, and her present place among the pantheon of eighteenth-century literary giants was not always secure.

Burney remained aware of such fluctuations which marked her authorial reputation even in her lifetime. Much could be said about her attempts at negotiating the place she wished to hold on the literary scene, either through her publications, or the prefatory materials accompanying her novels, or through the most powerful means of eighteenth--century publicity – word of mouth. And, likewise, much could be said of the role Burney's friends played in these negotiations. Their active engagement in them ranged from openly canvassing for proper recognition of Burney's talent to administering cautious advice and mitigating her creative powers for the sake of propriety. While modern criticism has contextualised and documented the importance of these relationships for Burney's early career, little has been said of her utilising these connections later in life. This paper sets out to explore Burney's last published work, *Memoirs of Doctor Charles Burney*, for the ways the author used the influential friends of her youth as instruments for the resuscitation of what she saw as her wilting literary reputation.

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Burney began her work on *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* in the 1820s, when she was in her early seventies, but did not publish them until 1832, when she had turned eighty. Ostensibly a biography of her father, Charles Burney, the *Memoirs* seem, in fact, much more an autobiographical text, with the Memorialist, as Burney writes about herself, as the main focus of the narrative. Also, the father and daughter's mutual friends such as Samuel Johnson, Samuel Crisp, Edmund Burke and Mary Delany feature in the three volumes less as Charles Burney's acquaintances, and primarily as admirers of Frances's talent. As such, these well-known figures were perhaps intended as signposts guiding the readers to the prominent place which Burney the novelist should hold in literary history. These friends and well-wishers often comforted, advised, and promoted Burney in her youth. In her old age, the writer seems to have returned to them for support. However, this time, the friends staying alive only in her memories, she was entirely in charge of managing their relationships herself. With the benefit of hindsight and her eye on her future audiences, Burney certainly managed them carefully, in order to create her self-image as a writer to be valued on a par with the established giants, such as Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding.

Samuel Crisp, the Second Daddy

Samuel Crisp (1707–1783), an impoverished member of the London *beau monde*, was a recognised art connoisseur and literary critic. In his middle age he retired to rented rooms in a remote village of Chessington, where only the closest of his friends were welcome to visit. Some of the few to spend long holidays in the retreat were Charles Burney and his children, thanks to Crisp's warm affection for his younger friend. Of all Charles Burney's children Frances soon became Crisp's favourite, and he encouraged her to correspond with him from London. The letters that followed became a practice arena for the young Burney's literary talent.

Charles Burney's London house certainly afforded much for retelling in amusing character sketches and scene descriptions. The Burney household was frequently a venue for artistic assemblies, where the celebrities of the 18th-century music and theatre exhibited their talents during private concerts or familiar conversations. Fames such as the singer Pacchierotti

entertained select parties at Dr. Burney's, while the actor David Garrick was a welcome guest whether any other party was assembled or not. Later, as the weight of Charles Burney's acquaintance shifted from the musical and theatrical to the literary world, his daughter met the famous Samuel Johnson and his celebrated friend, Mrs. Thrale. The brilliant spectacles these visits produced were then relayed by the young Frances in the narrative form of letters to her mentor, Samuel Crisp.

It has been noted by many scholars that Burney's correspondence with Crisp, whom she affectionately called "Daddy," might be seen as a rehearsal of her authorial powers before she had completed her first novel, *Evelina*, which – tellingly – was written in the epistolary form of a young woman's letters to a sage-like guardian.[1] Indeed, Burney's talent, thanks to her father's large and varied acquaintance, was allowed to feast on much food for thought, and in the person of Crisp it was also provided with a means through which the thought could be digested into a narrative form. Importantly, the written products of this process were not merely a girl's effusions for her own use, but were composed for and checked against a consummate literary audience – a writer and literary critic, Daddy Crisp.

When in *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* Frances returns to her youth and the time of her family's residence in London, she calls her old mentor to her aid again. Burney often chooses not to write retrospectively about this period, but instead inserts into her record her youthful letters to Crisp. A quarter of the second volume of the memoirs consists of quotations from Frances's correspondence with her adopted Daddy.[2] We may wonder about the reasons for this choice. The way Burney explains it, letters "which were written to the moment by this Memorialist to Mr. Crisp […] more pointedly display [the] cast and nature" of her father's acquaintance and his way of life "than any merely descriptive reminiscences" (Burney 1832, vol. 2: 10–11). Although this is undeniably true, there may be other purposes which the quoted letters served. They are written in a very different style in comparison to the one permeating the retrospective narrative: while the mature writer's recollections emanate piety and filial devotion in a suitably pompous style,[3] her youthful correspondence

1 See, for instance, Doody 1988: 27–34.

2 This amounts to over a hundred out of four hundred pages of the volume.

3 An example can be found in Frances's account of her father's resuming his work on his *History of Music* in order to divert his thoughts away from the deaths of his two close friends: "This labour [*History of Music*], however fatiguing to his nerves, and harassing to his health […] gradually became, what literary pursuits will ever become to minds

addressed to Crisp is much lighter, more jocular and clearly intended to amuse.[4] The letters are strongly reminiscent of the novel *Evelina*, and within the frame of the *Memoirs*, they precede the extended episode relating the novel's publication. Together they appear to serve the function of reminding the readers more forcibly about the early literary prowess of the author. This may have been a deliberate strategy Burney decided on after the very unfavourable reviews which followed her last novel, *The Wanderer*, published in 1814, and which marked a supposed decline of her compositional skills. We shall come back to these later; thus far it may suffice to say that *Evelina* survived this wave of criticism largely unscathed, and perhaps was seen by Burney as a good candidate among her novels to be recommended to the new nineteenth-century audience again. Thus, by inserting her own youthful letters about St Martin's Street into her latest work, Burney utilised her friendship with Crisp yet again for the purposes of displaying her literary talent, but this time her audience was the public at large.

Another function which Burney's letters to Crisp may have played in *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, relates to the author's publications yet to come, on which she may have intended to capitalise further. Burney may have hoped to "sell" her own autobiographical papers as very interesting and rewarding to read in the future. The *Memoirs* could thus be seen as an advertisement for *Letters and Diaries of Madame d'Arblay*, which would follow Frances's own death and seal her literary fame posthumously. In this scheme, the letters to Samuel Crisp function as a useful teaser for the Burney papers yet to be published.

The Language of Flowers: Samuel Johnson and Mary Delany

Samuel Johnson and Mary Delany are rarely paired in literary scholarship. Johnson is recognised primarily as the author of the first English dictionary and the most prominent eighteenth-century literary critic,

capable of their development [...] first a check the morbid sadness, next a renovator of wearied faculties, and lastly, through their oblivious influence over all objects foreign to their purposes, a source of enjoyment" (Burney 1832, vol. 2: 354).

[4] This may be illustrated by the following closure of one of Burney's letters expressing regret at Crisp's absence at a private concert in Poland Street, where her family lived: "How we wished for our dear Mr. Crisp! Do pray, now, leave your gout to itself, and come to our next music meeting" (18).

while Delany is remembered for her posthumous letters, and for her spectacular floral collages. Both Johnson and Delany were, though at different points in Burney's life, the writer's close friends. A careful analysis of *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* reveals that Frances may have deliberately put these two authors together in her last published work. By placing herself alongside these two very different models of artistic expression she may have wished to point to herself as an author who in the art of writing combined the masculine strength of Johnson with the allegedly more feminine delicacy and strict propriety of Delany.

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In the second half of the eighteenth century, Doctor Johnson's style was as much revered as his famous *Dictionary of the English Language*. In fact, when the dictionary was still a work in progress, young Charles Burney wrote his first letter to the distinguished lexicographer, who at the time was known to him only through his publications, and volunteered this praise for Johnson's *The Rambler*: "I must add that your periodical productions seem to me models of true genius, useful learning, and elegant diction, employed in the service of the purest precepts of religion, and the most inviting morality" ([in:] Burney 1832, vol. 1: 120). Charles Burney admired Johnson's principles and the way they were clothed in words, or as he put it, the fact that in Johnson's writing "wisdom and virtue" were ornamented "with those beautiful flowers of language" (ibid.).

It must have, therefore, seemed to the young Frances Burney praise indeed when her father thus judged the phrasing of Mr. Villars' letters in *Evelina*: "In all Villars' letters there is as much *sound sense, & manly reasoning* as I ever met with in any thing in my Life," and then added that "Johnson could not have expressed himself better" (Burney 1994: 53). The stressed "masculinity" and Johnsonian style of Villars' passages in the anonymously published *Evelina* led to many readers' assumptions that the text was written by a man (Park 2010: 139–140). Burney's preface to the novel, where she listed several male writers such as Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding, in whose footsteps she implied she was following, only strengthened this common belief.[5]

Frances's claim to the inheritance of Fielding's and Richardson's laurels was soon publically supported by Samuel Johnson himself. Burney

[5] For a detailed discussion of Burney's preface to *Evelina*, see e.g. Batchelor 2013.

and Johnson met in 1778, a few months after the publication of *Evelina*. Soon "the leviathan of literature" and the debutante authoress became close friends. Jane Spencer traces the development of their relationship, stressing Johnson's influence on Burney's perception of her professional self. Johnson's egalitarian mode of allowing women and men equal shares of literary talent implied that female writers were just as entitled to respected positions in the accounts of literary history as men were. Johnson was not only a writer himself, but primarily a critic, and saw it as his job to establish this view for posterity. He did not hesitate, for instance to name Elizabeth Carter as a worthy successor of Alexander Pope (Spencer 2005: 46). Johnson was also the most charismatic of the English eighteenth-century literary critics, and at the height of his popularity, when Burney met him, his opinions were seen as decisive. Thus when he proclaimed that "there were passages in [*Evelina*] which might do honour to Richardson" (Burney 1994, vol. 3: 60), and that "there is nothing so delicately finished in all Harry Fielding's Works" (110), the matter seemed settled.

Samuel Johnson did more than publically praise Burney's first novel. He represented her as his heiress to the canon of prose writing. Jane Spencer explores the tradition of literary kinship in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and reveals how it produced also literary canons. She shows young writers tracing their poetic lineage to famous forefathers (for instance, Alexander Pope saw himself as a successor to John Dryden), and she presents the established writers as looking for promising heirs (for example, John Dryden perceived his dramatic successor in William Congreve) (18–45). Interestingly, Spencer's analysis reveals that such traditions were – up to Johnson's time – strictly patriarchal, with women apparently being denied participation in the passing down of literary talent. Johnson seems to have made an attempt to include women in the literary kinship, as his patronage of several female writers testifies. But among them only Frances Burney was explicitly vowed as Johnson's own literary daughter. As early as September 1778, Johnson apparently declared: "Dr. Goldsmith was my last [protégé]: But I have had none since his Time. – till my little Burney came! […] Miss Burney is the Heroine now" (Burney 1994b, vol. 3: 168). By March 1779, Burney wrote: "Dr. Johnson is another Daddy Crisp to me and […] [thinks of me] as one who had long laid claim to him" (255).

When Burney was writing her second novel, *Cecilia*, she had already received much critical limelight for *Evelina*, and had been known as Dr. Johnson's favourite. The novel testified that Burney felt ready to take

up her literary father's mantle as far as style was concerned, and to great critical acclaim. *The Monthly Review*'s praise for *Cecilia*, for instance, reiterated the earlier applause for *Evelina*, and added further praise on the command of language exhibited by "the fair Author," which "appears to have been formed on the best model of Dr. Johnson" (1782: 453).

In the memoirs of her father, Burney records the success of her first two novels in great detail, especially when it comes to the homage paid her by the contemporary literary fames. Initially, Johnson plays in these recollections the prominent part of a benevolent mentor. Later, he features as a friend who treats Burney as his equal, and eventually a note of his is transcribed, in which Johnson apparently asks Burney for a visit (Burney 1832, vol. 2: 356). The familiarity between Burney and Johnson thus carefully documented, and strategically intersected among the critical praise which linked Burney's style to that of the famous lexicographer, may have served the function of reminding her new audiences of the literary lineage which Burney wished to preserve for herself as an author.

Such vigorous self-promotion may have appeared to Burney a necessary policy by 1830, when her fame had lost much of its earlier lustre. After years of triumph, when Burney's position seemed firmly established in the literary tradition of English prose, came the time when the critical tide turned. Samuel Johnson died in 1784 and his influence on the literary criticism and canon gradually faded. *Camilla* (1796), Burney's third novel, was received with mixed feelings by the contemporary reviewers, and *The Wanderer; Or, Female Difficulties* (1814) was seen as a proof of the deteriorating powers of its author. Some, such as William Hazlitt of *The Edinburgh Review*, went so far as to declare that Burney never had any real authorial powers in the first place.

In his review of *The Wanderer*, Hazlitt makes a grand appraisal of the English novelistic tradition, and mentions Burney's novel only briefly at its end. He also explicitly negates the more egalitarian versions of literary history of Johnson's times. Women writers are, according to him, a category apart, for just as they "have less muscular power," they also possess negligent amounts of "reason, passion and imagination" in their psychological compositions (337). If they learn anything, including any language, even their mother tongue, "it is by rote merely, without troubling themselves about the principles" (ibid.). With such deficiencies, Hazlitt remarks, women cannot be expected to compete in the properly male literary world. As Hazlitt asserts, Burney is no exception to this rule. She is "a mere common observer of manners, and also a very woman" in the sense that she always looks at the world from "a point of view

in which it is the particular business of women to observe" (336). Her dialogues and textual caricatures are amusing, Hazlitt admits, but this comprises perhaps a hundred out of nine hundred pages in *The Wanderer*. The rest lacks force, grandeur and precision of linguistic expression (338). *Evelina*, Hazlitt does not hesitate to proclaim, was the best of Burney's novels because it was the shortest. As for *The Wanderer*, she should have never attempted the task of such a long and complex story for there "she never excelled" (ibid.). Thus, as Jane Spencer notes, "Hazlitt strenuously undid the link between Burney and her male precursors which Johnson had emphasized" (70).

Hazlitt was not the only reviewer to stress the feeble femininity of Burney's writing. In his 1815 assessment of *The Wanderer* for *The Quarterly*, John Wilson Croker made a particularly derisive attack on the novel as a work of an old woman whose powers of entertaining her audience have entirely passed. It begins with a claim that Burney copied her own plots with each of her publications following *Evelina*. This "tautology," as Croker terms it (125), had always been a serious defect, but had grown worse, for in *The Wanderer* there is nothing to

> beguile attention from a defect [which] has increased in size and deformity exactly in the same degree that the beauties have vanished. *The Wanderer* has identical features of *Evelina*, but of *Evelina* grown old; the vivacity, the bloom, the elegance [...] are vanished; the eyes are there, but they are dim; the cheek, but it is furrowed; the lips, but they are withered [...] we have completed the portrait of an old coquette who endeavours, by the wild tawdriness and laborious gaiety of her attire,[6] to compensate for the loss of the natural charms of freshness, novelty and youth. (125–126)

Devoney Looser in her recent study *Women Writers and Old Age in Great Britain*, points out that Burney's age may have played an important role in these critical assessments. Madame d'Arblay, as her niece later wrote, "lived to be a classic" (Burney 1846, vol. 7: 384), but, Looser suggests, she refused to gracefully retire from the literary scene (2008: 34). Instead, to Croker's disgust, she insisted on flaunting her authorial charms at new audiences.

Hazlitt's and Croker's reviews of *The Wanderer* deny that the very foundation for Burney's right to a position in a literary history ever existed – her spiritual inheritance of Johnson's talent and her kinship with the male

[6] Croker meant here the improbable, according to him, plot of the novel.

writers such as Richardson and Fielding are made out to be only a figment of her senile imagination. This way, Hazlitt and Croker seem to equate Burney with the unpleasant character of the elderly Mrs. Ireton in *The Wanderer*, who is described as unfortunate enough to have reached "old age, without stories to amuse, or powers to instruct" (Burney 1991: 543). This must have pained Burney particularly, for it is evident that when she was creating Mrs. Ireton and allowed her to be summed up so, it was with the full confidence that she herself at the age of sixty-two could testify to the exact opposite. In the preface to *The Wanderer*, she represented her novel as "entertainment" which "gives to juvenile credulity [...] lessons of experience without its tears" (7). She thus must have seen herself as the very antithesis to Mrs. Ireton – a mature woman who has the wisdom to teach and amuse her audience. Burney further claimed in the preface that she was "past the period of chusing to write, or desiring to read, a merely romantic love-tale," but she stressed that she still possessed "the power of interesting the affections, while still awake to them herself, through the many much loved agents of sensibility, that still hold in their pristine energy her conjugal, maternal, friendly [...] and filial feelings" (9).

Such assertions of lively feelings at the age of sixty-two did not go down well with the male critical body of the reviewers, but Burney would not entirely back down. Perhaps in response to the criticism of Hazlitt and Croker, for the *Memoirs* she attempted a new style of writing, which – she presumably judged – would particularly suit a woman of her age and literary skill: a flowery language of sensibility and piety, a language of a feeling heart within a dutiful daughter's chest; but also a language with a command of phrase which sets it above the common discourse of the times. At sixty-two, she was judged "a very woman," with "furrowed cheek" and "withered lips," but at eighty-one, when the *Memoirs* were published, she attempted a different image – that of "the fairest model of female excellence of the days that were passed" (Burney 1832, vol. 2: 300).

Burney uses the above phrase in *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* to describe not herself but her friend Mary Delany. The textual portrait of Delany which Burney creates in the *Memoirs* is the most detailed and extended of any women she describes in the three volumes. It may be that Mary Delany's image seemed particularly vivid to Burney at the time. When the two women met, Burney was in her thirties and Delany in her eighties, but despite this difference in age they quickly became close friends. When Burney was writing her reminiscences of this paragon of virtue and a highly original artist, she herself was nearing her eightieth birthday. The way she constructed the portrait of her friend for the *Memoirs*

may be read as a reflection of how she herself wished to be perceived at that time. All her recollections of Delany centre around the idea of old age being a productive period of life, during which a woman does not need to diminish – on the contrary – she may increase her own pleasure in the society, and – importantly, she may also return much pleasure to her social circles.

For the likeness of Mary Delany, Burney chose two ingredients, which she must have considered her friend's most prominent features: her charming manners and her artistic accomplishments. Importantly, neither, Burney stressed, became impaired with her advancing age. According to Burney, Delany's personality was comprised of "sweetness, sense, dignity" (310), which allowed her to appear "as lively, gay, pleasant, and good-humouredly arch and playful, as she could have been at eighteen" (398). Apart from these personal charms "which rendered her nearly fascinating" (304), Delany afforded her company also the sensations of new artistic experience. She had been an accomplished painter since her youth, but with age, she began to experiment with new forms of art. Delany famously completed 985 accurate, life-size, three--dimensional collages representing various flowers and flowering herbs. Importantly, this creative bloom occurred for the artist at a period of her life which was not at the time generally considered productive: between seventy and eighty-eight. Delany, however, despite appearing highly conservative and old-fashioned in many ways, seemed to defy the traditional concepts of aging. At least Burney's descriptions encourage such a reading of her portrait.

Burney mentions her friend's advanced age on many occasions, implicitly pointing to the benefits that were to be reaped from such maturity. Delany's artistic expertise and her confidence to experiment with new techniques seem to have resulted from her long experience as an artist. What Burney emphasises also as a significant factor in Delany's late artistic success is the fact that, despite increasing bodily frailty, neither her understanding nor her feelings had become impaired with age. She quotes her friends words: "I have been told that when I grew older, I should feel less; but I do not find it so! I am sooner, I think, hurt or affected than ever" (398). This sensitivity appears to Burney an asset. In a letter to her sister where she describes Mary Delany, she exclaims: "How truly desirable are added years, where the spirit of life evaporates not before its extinction" (369). Thus, in Mary Delany, Burney presents an image of a lovable, respectable and charming woman who commands her audience's admiration with intelligent conversation and with her artistic creativity. Both

these sources of social esteem are the share of the elderly artist, Burney suggests, partly because her quick feelings have not been blunted with time.

As a composer of her father's memoirs, Burney also appears to be an author of acute sensibility. This comes out occasionally in her linguistically extravagant descriptions of art, such as her textual likeness of the Apollo Belvedere:

> that unrivalled production, of which the peerless grace, looking softer, though of marble, than the feathered snow, and brightly radiant, though like the sun, simply white, strikes upon the mind rather than the eye, as an ideal representative of ethereal beauty. (Burney 1832, vol. 1: 175)

Critics such as John Wilson Croker openly laughed at such "strange *galimatias* of pompous verbosity" (1833: 98) and defined it as "a prominent and almost ludicrous feature of the book" (101). We may understand his criticism in instances such as the above effusions about Apollo Belvedere, but Croker's review makes it out that such descriptions dominate the entire text of *Memoirs*. This, however, is by no means the case. They are rather occasionally woven into the fabric of many styles. Much of the three volumes, and particularly the second and third, is made up of anecdotes and textual portraits of people with whom Charles Burney and his daughter had been acquainted. These stories are often witty, amusing, or simply interesting because they apparently quote words of Johnson, Burke, Walpole, Boswell, or the royal couple with a typically Burneyesque ear for linguistic detail. A good example for this can be found in the depiction of Lady Mary Duncan, Dr. Burney's great admirer, and a woman well-known at the time for her eccentric behaviour and idiosyncratic language. The lady, Burney relates, became very much disturbed at the news that the Doctor's house was once broken into and several hundred pounds was stolen. Some days after the event, she apparently stormed into St Martin's Street and entrusted the astonished Frances with the exact same sum of money, making her promise that the identity of the donor should not be revealed to her father.

> She had been, she protested, on the point of *non compos* ever since that rogue had played the Doctor such a knavish trick, as picking his bureau to get at his cash; in thinking how much richer she, who had neither child nor chick, nor any particular great talents, was than she ought to be; while a man who was so much a greater scholar, and with such fry of young ones at this heels, all of them such a set of geniuses, was suddenly made so much poorer. (Burney 1832, vol. 3: 35–36)

In *Memoirs* such comic scenes are often intermingled with passages where pathos and sensibility dictate the stylistic devices, but also with portraits where the Johnsonian penetrating judgement and dignity of diction seem the prevalent features. The description of Mary Delany is written in such a way, and many others could be listed alongside it. As an example we may consider Burney's characterisation of the great Bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu:

> Her conversational powers were of a truly superior order; strong, just, clear, and often eloquent […]. But her reputation for a wit seemed always in her thoughts, marring their natural flow, and untutored expression […]. Her smile, though most generally benignant, was rarely gay; and her liveliest sallies had a something of anxiety rather than of hilarity – till their success was ascertained by applause. (Burney 1832, vol. 2: 271)

Such sketches of famous characters strike with the author's stout confidence in her judgement. No bashfulness hinders Burney from expressing her opinions of people who were, after all, situated well above her on the ladder of the eighteenth-century social life. The language in which these portraits are drawn, even for the nineteenth-century audience, must have seemed somewhat old-fashioned, but also may have rendered such episodes reminiscent of Johnson's opinionated writing. While for reviewers such as Hazlitt or Croker it may have been a flaw, we may also see it as Burney's quite intentionally linking herself to the prose achievements of the previous era, when Johnson was "the leviathan of literature," and she was his acknowledged literary daughter.

Conclusions

Burney's style in *Memoirs*, quite contrary to what her contemporary reviewers would have us believe, is far from uniform. It varies from playful to serious, and from quite matter-of-fact to effusively pathetic. This range corresponds naturally with the generic mixture which forms the text as a whole. This diversity, then, shows its author as a mature artist experimenting with her art: working and re-working her textual devices to create new images, and particularly: a new image of herself. In a thoughtful response to the scathing criticism levelled at her last novel, Burney presents herself as a defiant elderly writer who refuses to withdraw her claims to an elevated position in the literary history. In the *Memoirs*,

she labours to rebut the picture of her painted by Croker and Hazlitt – that of an elderly garrulous woman who plagiarises her own plots in an old-fashioned language. Instead, Burney creates an alternative authorial image for the readers: that of a mature artist *with* "stores to amuse and instruct."

As a part of this plan she turns for support to her old friends: Samuel Crisp, Samuel Johnson, and Mary Delany. The letters to Crips, which Burney extensively quotes in *Memoirs* help her evoke the charm of her youthful style, which may encourage the new audiences to reach for her early novels, still untainted by adverse criticism. The correspondence with Crisp functions also as an early advertisement of Burney's own life writing, which by 1832 and the publication of the *Memoirs*, was already in preparation. Further, Burney's later and far more famous "Daddy," Dr Johnson, is then recalled as the most devoted of her champions in the world of literary criticism, and his proclamation of Burney as the heiress to his mantle is forcibly reiterated. Alongside the stories which recall Johnson's admiration for his protégé's talent, Burney also strategically locates reminiscences, which remind her readers that her own style can still be compared to that of Johnson. Burney makes it clear, however, that her writing does not merely copy Johnson's style, but creates what would be seen at the time as its more feminine version. In turn, by inserting Mary Delany into the equation, Burney stresses the value of sensitivity and emotion when displayed beside "masculine" astute logic and keen understanding. The portrait of Delany appears significant also because it represents another successful and respectable elderly woman artist who had refused to be stigmatised as past her productive years.

Therefore, in the last volumes of *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* Frances Burney appears to align herself primarily with two models: Samuel Johnson and Mary Delany. Interestingly, both were praised for their flowers – Delany for her life-like botanical collages, and Johnson for "the flowers of language" (Burney 1832, vol. 1: 120). This combination of Johnson and Delany in Burney's projected self-image is an interesting way of merging "the manliness" and musculature of linguistic expression, which had earlier been attributed to her, with other – allegedly more feminine – features. It is quite likely that Burney would not have resisted Hazlitt's description of her as the "very woman," but she would have probably defined the phrase differently. She would have seen it in Johnsonian terms: as a definition of a writer who deserved recognition both for the strength in her command of language and for the sensitivity of her perception and delicacy of her feelings. Thus, with the succour of her influential friends, Burney did strive

to represent herself as "the very woman writer" – the rightful heiress to Samuel Johnson, and not only in her achievements in the field of English prose, but also – or perhaps primarily – in the egalitarian notions which asserted that men and women, the young and the mature, had equal rights to critical recognition and a respectable position in literary history.

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